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ABSTRACT

The major goal of graduate education in speech communication is to advance knowledge about human communication through research and by training minds. Graduate education differs from undergraduate education because it emphasizes not only what we know, but how we come to know. Often, however, graduate education is just seen as being an extension of undergraduate study. Although the opposite sometimes occurs and too great demands are made upon beginning graduate students, usually an elitist attitude causes faculty to underestimate the importance of the Master's degree. Holders of an M.A. ought to understand the issues involved in the generation of knowledge, be able to read and criticize a research report, and be able and willing to contribute to the discipline. Most research reports submitted to professional journals, however, fail to demonstrate the significance and importance of the research, fail to match research design to the questions posed, and are badly written. A strategy of viewing graduate education as professional life, not simply a preparation for it, may solve some of these problems. For instance, having students prepare and try to publish a professional review of a recent basic textbook provides a substantive supplemental foundation in a content oriented course. A miniconvention serves a similar purpose. Teaching research methodology is a bit more difficult, but still involves recreating real situations. (JL)

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TEACHING RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND WRITING IN THE EMERALD CITY

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Paper presented at the Central States Speech Association Convention, Lincoln, Nebraska, April 7-9, 1983

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TEACHING RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND WRITING IN THE EMERALD CITY

The Emerald City, as you may recall from "The Wizard of Oz," is, from a distance, a magnificant looking structure--a bright, attractive, green-colored ediface. The city is perhaps suggestive of an ivory towered complex--a group of high-rise buildings covered with unusually translucent, glowing ivy. In a metaphorical sense, graduate school is an emerald city; an exciting place with a lure, magic, and harmony all its own. Indeed, graduate schools, like the Emerald City, are selective. Not everyone who drags him or herself across the poppy fields of an undergraduate program gets beyond our outer doors. Indeed, they must first satisfy an admissions committee; a keeper of the gate. Those who gain admission find (we hope) a stimulating and dynamic, but somewhat strange place; one filled with busy people who talk a funny lingo, behave in sometimes bizzare, but highly predictable ways, and praise pattern and order which they invent. Most younger city residents run around asking questions of older residents who are called wizards. Wizards are those leaders who, by virtue of experience and training, are supposed to be in the know. Most of us here have some experience in emerald cities. I am a kind of city official, a wizard, in my own realm, just as you are in yours. In a sense, we are all wizards, although those

most recently admitted into our cities are "wizards in training" or WITS.

I want to share with you some observations about our emerald communities and how we train future wizards. My remarks are intended to highlight some areas in need of attention. Additionally, I will offer some suggestions about how we can improve upon, if not eliminate, the difficulties I see. First, however, permit me to overview the major objectives of graduate education in speech communication.

The end of graduate education is scholarship (Phillips, 1979; Delia, 1979). At its most fundamental level, scholarship involves, on the one hand, asking significant questions and, on the other, designing research methodologies capable of providing meaningful answers to those questions (Petelle, 1980). Gouran (1979) notes that a discipline may be considered distinctive to the extent that: (1) there is identification of and a degree of consensus on fundamental concepts, (2) knowledge about the relations between and among the specified concepts is advanced, and (3) the produced knowledge has some utility. Gouran also suggests that speech communication is concerned with the concepts of messsage producer, message, message target or responding receiver, and the linkage between the agents or elements involved (Gouran, 1979). Delia (1979) suggests that ". . . speech communication graduate education should encourage development of both the research skills and theoretical sophistication necessary to advance understanding of human communication and the ability to

apply the discipline's understanding in the analysis and solution of concrete communication problems." Thus, the major purpose and goal of graduate education is to advance knowledge about human communication. We advance knowledge by doing research and by training minds. We train minds: (1) to formulate questions, (2) to devise and execute appropriate methodologies for answering questions, and (3) to prepare publishable reports on the outcomes of studies. Unless entered into the body of knowledge, research outcomes fail to maximally contribute to our knowledge base. Having established what may be considered the major objectives of graduate education, let me turn my focus to several areas in need of attention if we are to improve the effectiveness of our efforts to train those who come to us.

Most of the sources previously cited are affiliated with what are known as "research institutions," schools that characteristically offer the Ph.D. and enjoy extensive research support in the form of libraries, computer facilities and release time. Many of us involved in graduate education, however, operate within what are known as "comprehensive universities." Comprehensive universities place primary emphasis on teaching, but encourage and increasingly require evidence that faculty are professionaly active intellectual contributors in their disciplines. Within such institutions one sometimes finds a problem deriving from failure to recognize any meaningful distinction between undergraduate and graduate education.

Undergraduate education largely emphasizes what we know about communication. Graduate education must

emphasize both what we know and how we come to know. All too frequently, faculty at comprehensive universities fail to recognize this distinction and consequently fail to cultivate a graduate attitude, i.e., an emphasis on how. The result is that often what receives graduate credit is simply an extension of undergraduate mentality: knowledge acquisition with minimal, if any, solid and meaningful exposure to the techniques of knowledge generation and dissemination. Too often, graduate students get exposure to jargon, not thought processes; memory drill, not method. I am not advancing a blanket indictment of M.A. level graduate training within comprehensive universities, but I believe we need to do more than we have to distinguish graduate education from undergraduate education. Structurally, this problem is visible in "mixed" courses wherein graduate and undergraduate students receive essentially the same instruction, although graduate students, supposedly, either do more work or are evaluated against a more rigorous standard of performance.

A less extensive problem is something of the reverse of the one just noted. If some university faculty fail to respond to the task of distinguishing graduate mentality from undergraduate, a few others overdo it. These faculty fail to recognize any limitations whatsoever at the beginning level of graduate instruction. Some of us may be guilty of teaching only what we are presently doing, i.e., our own research. Some others, recently certified wizards, may tend to teach what they have most recently mastered; some of the "how to do's" of research. The result is that

some graduate students who are just starting out are catapulted far beyond what they can reasonably and competently accomplish. In an introductory research methodology course, for example, we can predict academic trauma when we spot syllabi that focus on factor analysis, discriminant function analysis, and applications of cannonical correlation by the second month of the first year of graduate school.

A related problem has to do with the elitest attitude permeating our discipline and the degrees we award and the impact that attitude has on our expectations for our students and their expectations for themselves. We expect far too little of graduate students, particularly at the masters degree level. Our toleration of an elitist attitude is reflected whenever we hear comments like: "I'm just a first year student." or "I don't know, I don't have a Ph.D." or "What is it that your want me to learn or do?" Translated, these sorts of comments say: "I can't make a contribution, I've got no ideas." "I need credentials before I can have an idea." "My role in this discipline is inherently peripheral." In my judgment, many of us simply expect too little of our students. Consequently, we may see the acquisition of an M.A. degree as, well, not much of an intellectual accomplishment. Completion of an M.A. ought to serve as verification that someone has mastered a program of study tht equips them to function competently at the basic level of knowledge generation. At the very least, the holder of an M.A. degree ought to understand the fundamental issues involved in the generation of knowledge.

At the very least, he or she ought to be able to read and criticize a fundamental research report. At the very least, he or she ought to be able to write clearly in his or her efforts to make a contribution to the discipline. Ideally, he or she ought to want to make a contribution to the discipline.

Immediate past editor of the Western Journal of Speech Communication, Lawrence B. Rosenfeld, speaking at the 1982 Speech Communication Association Convention in Louisville, noted that only 15 - 20% of submitted manuscripts ultimately get published in our journals. Based on his experience, Professor Rosenfeld provided an overview of common problem areas in submitted manuscripts and he indicated that he felt his experience was very likely the experience of other editors in the field. The problems in submitted research reports are: (1) failure to demonstrate the significance and importance of the research questions, (2) failure to match research design or method with the questions posed, and (3) an inability to write a research report that is economical, clear, and readable.

If the end of graduate education is scholarship, then why is it that only 15 - 20% of those who seek to make a contribution to knowledge are successful? Haven't they learned in graduate school what they need to know to function with a high degree of competence and success in the discipline? Haven't they learned how to phrase a researchable question? Can't they devise a methodology for answering questions? Can't they write a clear report that tells interested peers what they have done, what they found

out and what it means? Now, some of you are probably thinking: "Miller's got another fly in his ointment because we all secretly recognize that one really needs at least a Ph.D. and several year's of real experience before one is minimally equipped to make a contribution to knowledge in our discipline." Well, I disagree! Indeed, I view that posture as but another facet of the crippling elitest attitude. As teacher-scholars we need to devote increased time and effort to our real business: advancing knowledge about human communication.

Having identified the major objectives of graduate education in speech communication, and having shared a few broad concerns about how we approach graduate education, I want to posit some very pragmatic suggestions about how we can become more successful in our efforts to teach research methodology and writing in our graduate programs.

Several years ago, Gerald R. Miller (1979) reported on the research team concept implemented successfully at Michigan State University. Students participate in real research. Professor Gerald Phillips (1979) of Penn State University has stressed the success of student-professor mentorships as effective instructional paradigms wherein students and professors move together into the mainstream of our business. I have nothing quite so programmatic to offer. I do have, however, a general pedagogical strategy; one that is theoretically simple and pragmatically powerful. Additionally, this strategy is flexible and can be implemented through a variety of discrete instructional tasks. My goal, like that of professors Miller and

Phillips, is to move students as fully and as rapidly as possible, into the professional work of our discipline. Graduate education is not best viewed as preparation for professional life; graduate education is professional life. That's my strategy! We need to make learning activities real, now, in the present. We need to minimize motivating students through promises that someday it will be useful, so trust me and hang in there. In many instances it is precisely because graduate education seems both overwhelming and unreal that some of our students respond to our carefully designed instructional activities as painful hoops to be jumped; as if engaging in the mere "right of passage" will somehow accord knowledge and competence. One can implement this strategy in a variety of ways. I am going to share a few of the more basic and successful ones.

Preparing a professional review of a recent basic textbook or other appropriate book provides a substantive supplemental foundation in a content oriented course, for example, foundations of interpersonal or small group communication. Additionally, book reviews are generally very brief and highly focused. Consequently, one can work very closely with the student on his or her writing skills. Both Communication Education and the Journal of Communication will consider unsolicited book reviews for possible publication. Most faculty receive, from time-to-time, complementary books from publishers. One might loan them to students for review. Students ought to receive some instruction on what a review includes, what it

attempts to do and then be set to work. Models are available in the journals. Students are to read, write, and rewrite until the review is of professional quality or the best the student can do. In instances of the former, they are required to draft an appropriate letter offering their work to the Review Editor of an appropriate journal. Letters are typed on university letterhead and sent compliments of the university. That is, after all, what professionals do and enjoy. Even if the review should be rejected, the student will have had a genuine taste of one basic facet of what teacher-scholars do. In my experience, one in five unsolicited reviews is accepted and published.

In short, we need to put students eyeball-to-eyeball with active professionals in our discipline. Students learn very quickly that this is real, that the professor will not desert them, and that they can make a contribution. Basically, this strategy involves an application of the principle of social facilitation, but, instead of being the judge as the students compete with one another, the professor becomes the coach and judgment lies, at least partially, with the real academic world. I encourage this instructional posture at every opportunity. Indeed, six students in my graduate seminar in communication theory read, rated and ranked every paper submitted to the Communication Theory Interest Group for possible presentation at the 1983 Central States Speech Association Convention. We compared individual and group assessments with the final outcome of the paper selection

committee. Such instructional activities enable students to make a contribution to the discipline, if not knowledge per se, and in so doing they enhance their own growth and development.

If it should happen that you like the basic idea advanced here, but do not have a lot of textbooks to offer for review or just do not happen to be on a paper selection committee, then consider holding your own mini-convention. Have students anonymously submit their papers to an ad hoc panel of your departmental colleagues. They are to identify the top two or three papers. Then, invite a guest critic from another department or university to respond to the revised papers at a public presentation. The students, of course, must present and defend their work. This sort of miniaturization of an important professional activity is stimulating, reasonably inexpensive, and works well in generating maximum scholarly efforts.

Teaching research methodology is a bit more difficult and taxing in some respects, although the same fundamental strategy articulated with regard to writing, i.e., get them involved in something real is recommended. Yet, realistically speaking, methodology entails grounding in basic building blocks (e.g., reliability, validity, control, variables, magnitudes, relationships, and probability) before one can seriously engage in the process of using those blocks with creativity, insight, and skill. Consequently, begin with a solid basic graduate level text in research methods and appropriate lectures. Once basic

comprehension and understanding of the concepts is evidenced, one can begin to examine and critique solid and not so solid research which may be published or not. At times you might constitute an editorial board and require several students to make judgments on the suitability of the piece for publication. Importantly, the students must clearly detail the basis for their judgment. The assessment must be in written form and ought to be highly professional. Subsequently, you can explore conflicts in their respective recommendations and the methodological bases for those recommendations. Depending upon your professional activities, the students' level of competence, and the particular research, it is sometimes possible to expose students to a manuscript actually under editorial review. A student prepares his or her review, the assessment is discussed and ultimately forwarded to the editor. Generally, a letter of acknowledgement is sent by the editor to the student. The student gains experience operating in a real professional role and makes a contribution in the process.

Daniel Kahneman (1982,4), who received the American Psychological Association's 1982 Award for Distinguished Scientific Contribution to Psychology, recently stated: "It is a neverending source of surprise to me, as well as frustration, that the impact and durability of research and theory depends so much on achieving a level of mastery that demands years of hard work for each good idea." Future knowledge contributions in any discipline are inextricably linked to the competence and mastery levels of teachers and

students. If our theory and research are to have any durability and impact, then we must begin the years of hard work by solidly teaching research methodology and writing in our graduate schools. Unlike the Wizard of Oz, our salvation lies, not with a hot air balloon, but entirely with our contributions to knowledge.

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